

**“Love’s Responsibility”**  
Message by DD Adams  
4<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY  
Kemptown U.M. Church  
January 28, 2018

The Old Testament lesson is from the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 18, verse 15. The Lord your God will raise up a prophet like me from your community, from your fellow Israelites. *He’s the one you must listen to.*

The epistle lesson is 1 Corinthians, chapter 8, verses 1- 3 and 8 - 9. Now concerning meat that has been sacrificed to a false god: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes people arrogant, but love builds people up. If anyone thinks they know something, they don’t yet know as much as they should know. But if someone loves God, then they are known by God.

Food won’t bring us close to God. We’re not missing out if we don’t eat, and we don’t have any advantage if we do eat. But watch out or else this freedom of yours might be a problem for those who are weak.

The gospel lesson comes from Mark, chapter 1, verses 21-28. Jesus and his followers went into Capernaum. Immediately on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and started teaching. The people were amazed by his teaching, for he was teaching them with authority, not like the legal experts. Suddenly, there in the synagogue, a person with an evil spirit screamed, “What have you to do with us,

Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. You are the holy one from God.”

“Silence!” Jesus said, speaking harshly to the demon. “Come out of him!” The unclean spirit shook him and screamed, then it came out. Everyone was shaken and questioned among themselves, “What’s this? A new teaching with authority! He even commands unclean spirits and they obey him!” Right away the news about him spread throughout the entire region of Galilee. This is God’s word for God’s people. Please pray with me.

God we pray blessing on the reading, hearing, and understanding of your word today. Open each heart and mind to look introspectively and in humility as we give our whole self to you. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Peace be with you! In Deuteronomy the Israelites needed leadership. Moses was forbidden by God to enter the Promised Land and would soon die. The people were concerned about being given a prophet who would speak the words of God to them. Moses promises the Israelites that another prophet like him will be raised up.

Moses is referring to Jesus the Christ, the Messiah. Moses’ gives them instruction and states *“He’s the one you must listen to.”* They didn’t need false prophets. There were plenty in that day. They didn’t need fakes or imitations. They needed someone to speak the words of God. Prophets are the mouthpiece of God.

Martin Luther King Jr. was probably the last 20<sup>th</sup> century prophet we had . . . in life, this can be one's ageless quest . . . who is the real deal?

In 1 Corinthians 8, the people struggle with a similar issue—idols. The apostle Paul tells the people that “no idol in the world really exists—there is no god but one. There are so-called gods, yet *for us* there is one God, the Father, from whom there are all things and for whom we exist . . .” False prophets and idols. These are not the real deal.

The Israelites, like us, are tempted to turn to rules that affirm our doctrines, but rules aren't flexible and bendable like God's love. For example, rules like whether it's acceptable to eat food that's been offered to idols. Following rules and getting “our rights” don't always fit the bill when it comes to loving our brother and sister.

In Mark's gospel we're introduced to a demon who identifies the real deal! The demon cries out when he sees Jesus and says, “I know you, the Holy One of God.” So we go from false prophets, to idols with rules, to demons that operate outside of God's love. All the while we have the genuine god right in front of us, the One True and Living God . . .

The Israelites didn't need a false prophet, or an idol, or a man possessed by a demon. If they succumb to a false god or an idol—their eyes look outwardly. To see the real deal their eyes need to turn inward. Maybe during Lent we might look

inside ourselves, introspectively examining whether we're following Jesus who is a God of love.

The greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind and to love our neighbor as our self and our sister and brother. This is our greatest responsibility as a Christian. Here are some things to consider to live up to the standard of expressing the love of God to others.

Do we show God's love and accept all members in our congregation or do we follow our own individualistic path? We're a unified whole not a separate entity unto our self. We're called to nurture each other.

True, sometimes, when we "bump" into each other, we might wish that God would simply let us do our own thing. But we're called to love one another, to become self-less, to worship and serve as co-workers with Christ and with others—peacefully and in unity and harmony; this is our calling.

Our rights and responsibilities must seek the greater good of those around us. To work together, and if there's a conflict, to follow Matthew 18:15. "If your brother or sister sins against you, go and correct them *when you are alone together*. If they listen to you, then you've won over your brother or sister." This is a difficult command, but it is what it is. We're to speak together alone first speaking in love. Love let's go and releases its grip on what self-demands; it forgives.

In Corinthians 8, Paul addresses the issue of whether to eat meat that's been offered to idols. In *our* context, the question is this. What is our freedom in Christ? To do as we like isn't Christian freedom. Rather, freedom in Christ is being obedient to God's love. When we do that, it becomes an act of freedom for us, and we experience oneness and unity. Freedom is lived out when we prefer our brother and sister.

Paul is talking about our responsibility to each other. Christian freedom is concerned about people not rules. Love takes precedence when there's a question about how to move forward. God is more concerned about our relationship with each other than our need to follow rules. When Jesus exorcises the demon in Mark's gospel, he delivers the man who is separated from God. To learn how to love with God's love is much harder than following rules.

Our liberty in Christ is not about getting our way and insisting on our rights. Love is about meeting each other's need. I speak to myself as much as I speak to you. Love's responsibility binds us, it compels and constrains us, and it wants to control and reign in our hearts.

To see our world with God's light our spiritual eye must allow God's light to shine, and it expresses itself in love. God's light and love can't exist without each other. Often we miss God in troubled times, so let's train our eye to see with God's light. To look carefully, training our eye and responding in love.

Let's pray. God of love who desires relationship. Help us to release our rights to love that flows from your heart to ours. Fill us with forgiveness and move us forward. Connect us with each other as love rules our hearts and lives. Amen.